LISTING OF CLAIMS

Claims 1-35. **(cancelled)**

36. **(currently amended)** The system of claim 68 [[69]], wherein:
each fastener assembly is arranged in the associated cup to be locked with respect to the cup by progressive tightening of the respective screw.

37. **(cancelled)**

38. **(currently amended)** The system according to claim 68 [[37]], wherein:
the lower portion of the bone screw head is generally hemispherical.

39. **(currently amended)** The system of claim 68 [[69]], further comprising:
a generally, inwardly tapered conical surface formed on the interior of the cup and surrounding the bottom opening.

40. **(previously presented)** The system according to claim 38, further comprising:
a generally, inwardly tapered conical surface formed on the interior of the cup and surrounding the bottom opening,
wherein the seat ring rests on the conical surface and the lower portion of the bone screw head rests on the seat ring in a manner in which the intermediate portion of the shaft is angularly adjustable relative to the cup.

41. **(previously presented)** The system according to claim 40, further comprising:
a seat spacer adapted to rest on top of each the bone screw head and to be positioned beneath the rod, thereby supporting the rod relative to the bone screw.

42. **(previously presented)** The system according to claim 41, wherein:
the top surface of each bone screw head is generally dome-shaped and each seat spacer has a complementary contact surface that contacts the top surface of the

respective bone screw head in a manner permitting angular adjustment of the respective bone screw relative to the seat spacer.

Claims 43-67. **(cancelled)**

68. **(currently amended)** A spinal rod system for bridging one or more adjacent vertebrae, the system comprising:

a first and a second fastener assembly, each having a first end adapted to be driven into vertebral bone, an intermediate portion threaded for bone purchase and a second end with an enlarged head, at least one of the fastener assemblies comprising a bone screw and a non-resilient seat ring, the seat ring being slidingly received along an intermediate portion of the bone screw, the seat ring having an inside diameter that is smaller than a largest diameter of a head of the bone screw and an outside diameter that is larger than the diameter of the cup bottom opening, the seat ring and bone screw head co-acting to provide the enlarged head;

a first and a second rod retention assembly, each rod retention assembly comprising a cup with an open top end and an open bottom end, the bottom end of each rod retention assembly providing a generally circular opening that is larger than the intermediate portion of the fastener assembly and is smaller than the enlarged head of the fastener assembly, the open top end of each cup comprising a top opening defined by a generally cylindrical wall which comprises two diametrically opposed slots that extend downwardly from the uppermost portion of the generally cylindrical wall, the generally cylindrical wall further comprising an interior cylindrical wall surface with at least two inverted shoulders, each inverted shoulder having a contact surface that inclines radially outwardly from a center axis of the cup; [[;]]

a rod extending at least between the respective rod retention assemblies; and

a cap associated with each cup, each cap being generally cylindrical and having at least two shoulders that extend radially outward a center of the cap, a contact surface on each shoulder that is inclined upwardly in a radially outward direction; and

wherein the rod is received in the diametrically opposed slots in each rod retention assembly and retained therein by the cap, which is positioned in the cup

above the rod such that the respective contact surfaces of the cup and the cap contact each other.

Claims 69, 70. **(cancelled)**

71. **(previously presented)** A method of bridging a pair of adjacent vertebrae in a stabilizing manner, comprising the steps of:

providing an unassembled spinal rod retention system of claim 68;

Inserting the first and second fastener assemblies into the respective first and second rod retention cups;

installing the intermediate portions of the respective fastener assemblies into the adjacent vertebrae, one fastener assembly in each vertebra;

positioning the rod into the diametrically opposed slots of each of the rod retention assemblies so that the rod extends at least between the respective cups; and

installing a cap into each rod retention assembly atop the rod and tightening the cap such that a portion of the rod inside the cup is retained therein and the tightening locks angular orientation of the fastener assembly relative to the rod retention assembly.

72. **(previously presented)** The method claim 71, wherein:

the step of inserting the fastener assemblies into the respective rod retention assemblies comprises the substeps of:

inserting a seat ring into each of the rod retention cups, and

inserting a bone screw into each of the rod retention cups and through a central opening in the seat ring, such that intermediate portion of each bone screw extends outwardly from the rod retention cup and the seat ring, interposed between the head of the bone screw and the bottom opening of the rod retention cup, retains the bone screw in the rod retention cup in a angularly adjustable manner.